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ABSTRACT

This paper provides both a preliminary analysis of a survey on media education in India, and reviews of the research on media education in the western world, the limited media education research already done in India, and the more extensive research that has been done on the sociology of Indian youth and the media. The purpose of the survey was to investigate the extent of media access and exposure, the place of exposure, content preferences, and the views of secondary school students (N=1,000), teachers (N=150), and parents (N=60) on media and computer education. Students were from three distinct types of schools, as well as from different castes and religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Preliminary analyses of responses to completed questionnaires indicated that the majority of all students favored certain Hindi programs, but that they differed in the kind of television serial or film they liked, and the newspapers, magazines, and comics they preferred. A model of media education for India should take into account: (1) the striking similarities and differences among Indian children from different types of schools; (2) the mix of the traditional and modern in Indian society; (3) the diversity of regional, linguistic, and religious groups; (4) theories of communication developed from Indian thought and experience; and (5) the Latin American 'liberation' approach to media education which seeks to promote a dialogic and participative communication system as opposed to a top-down hierarchical communication structure. (46 references) (CGD)

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KEVAL JOE KUMAR

MEDIA EDUCATION: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Paper Presented to the

1986 International Television Studies Conference

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The review of research, and the data presented in this paper is the result of a doctoral programme in media education that I have been working on for the past year and a half at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester. I have just concluded an extensive survey of a thousand students in Bombay's secondary schools, and of 150 teachers and 60 parents as well. The full analysis of the survey is yet to be completed; so only a few findings will be discussed on the basis of a preliminary analysis.

This paper begins, then, with a brief overview of the research in media education in the Western world; goes on to describe the media education scene in India, raises some questions about the kind of media education needed in a developing country like India, and finally, after a review of Indian research on the sociology of school children, offers a tentative model of media education for India.

RESEARCH IN MEDIA EDUCATION

One of the least researched areas in the sphere of mass communications is that of media education. Courses and experiments in media education have been around since the beginning of the 'seventies (and in countries like Germany and the UK even earlier, particularly where newspaper and film studies are concerned). The three international surveys of the media education scene by UNESCO,[1] Jones[2] and Pungente[3] testify to the extensive programmes in

Australia, the United States, Scotland, England, France and other nations of Western Europe. However, evaluations of these teaching programmes mostly at the secondary school level are few and far between.[4] Where evaluative research in the area of media education has made some progress is in the measurement of knowledge-gains through pre- and post-tests. But the teaching programmes thus evaluated have been in the main short-term and experimental, and often drawn up and even taught by the evaluators themselves.[5] The majority of these evaluations have been of programmes conducted for children at the primary school level.[6] The evaluations invariably offer positive results but hardly any acknowledgement of the fact that gains in knowledge do not necessarily lead to critical viewing or listening.

The area of media education that has received the most attention has been the development of courses and curricula, and of textbooks and audiovisual kits to help teachers run these courses. The development of methodologies for teaching media education as a separate discipline or as an integral part of courses in social studies or languages has also made some headway.[7] Another area where some ground has been covered is the study of patterns of media preferences of young people, and their use and experience of the media.[8] Perhaps the most advanced area in the field of media education is the development of concepts and strategies for the analysis of modes of representation in different media, (stereotypes in advertising, cinema and television,

for example) particularly in the work of Hartley and Fiske,[9] and of the contributors to Screen and Screen Education. Radio and the press, and the folk media, still the most widespread and the most credible in developing countries like India, are, however, yet to be given due importance by media educators. Even where television literacy and critical viewing skills are concerned, the state of their knowledge is disappointingly limited.[10] Corder-Bolz points to only one major study[11] that has attempted empirically to identify the critical viewing skills. Very limited research, he adds, has focused on how visual literacy skills are acquired and how they should be taught. The literature on critical thinking skills has been largely ignored.[12] Indeed, the entire field of research on television literacy and the effect of television literacy instruction on critical viewing has less than a dozen entries.[13] Since 1983 when that calculation was made, about half a dozen have been added.

THE SITUATION IN INDIA

Research in media education has yet to make a start in India, though research in the sociology of youth is fairly well advanced. In fact, a search through the bibliographies on mass communication research in India compiled periodically by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, does not yield even a single article on the subject. I learned from my recent interviews with the faculty of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, the Department of Journalism and Communication (Osmania University), Hyderabad,

and with researchers at the Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad, that the concept of media education was new to them. They were unaware of the programmes in media education conducted over the past decade or so by the Amruthavani Communication Centre (Secunderabad) and the Xavier Institute of Communication (Bombay), and latterly by the Culture and Communication Institute (Madras) and other bodies. In 1983-84, Indian Television (Doordarshan) ran a series on film appreciation in collaboration with the faculty of the Film and Television Institute of India, Poona. The series looked at cinema as a serious art form rather than as a form of popular entertainment. It skirted the vital issues of the economics, politics and sociology of Indian films, and the popular response to them.

The Amruthavani Programme

The first Indian programme in media education was launched in the mid-seventies by the Amruthavani Communication Centre at Secunderabad. A two-year course for students of Standards VIII and IX it has at different times been termed 'Media Acquaintance', 'Educommunication' and more recently a 'Media Utilization Course' (MUC). It is run outside school hours and away from school as an 'extra-curricular' activity at the Centre. As the letter to parents says: Once a week your child will stay for an hour later than the others and attend the course on the premises of Amruthavani. At school your child will be under the special care of a teacher from the school itself, at Amruthavani your child will be

under the care of our instructor.[14]

A scrutiny of the aims of the course as set out in the letter to the students suggests a moralistic and protectionistic approach. You need, says the letter, to analyse and understand why something is good or bad. Besides, if you do not want to be misled or to be made use of by the media, some study of the media will be essential.[15] Another reason given for the need for media education is 'lots of students spend a great deal of time in reading books, magazines, listening to the radio and records, viewing television and cinema'. The letter stresses 'active participation' rather than 'being content with a passive role'.

Further, a close examination of the syllabus set out for the course and the printed texts on each of the mass media suggests that the history, the language, the technical aspects of production and the types of programmes in each media are the topics accorded priority. The social and political dimensions do not find any mention. Nor is the critical analysis of media products in their socio-cultural setting. The media, it transpires, are looked at in isolation, the ultimate aim being to prepare students to enter the fields of broadcasting and journalism. Says the letter to the parents: 'Besides helping your child to understand the language of the media, this course can serve as a first step towards a more intense study of the media. After high school graduation, your child is ready to enter the professional fields of broadcasting and journalism'. The course

instructors told me that some of the alumni had indeed become journalists. I noticed that most of the slides and films used to illustrate lessons were western in origin.

Xavier Institute's 'Mediaworld'

The Xavier Institute of Communications, Bombay, has since the mid-sixties been teaching part-time evening courses in journalism, advertising and marketing, photography and audio-visuals, film production, and public relations. In 1981 it started a programme of media education for high school students. As with the Amruthavani venture this course is outside the pale of the formal school system though run on school premises outside school hours and with the help of a team of school teachers. Known as 'Mediaworld' this programme aims at 'stimulating' the creative imagination, and developing a critical attitude towards the media and its values'.[16] It seeks to achieve this in 12 two-hour sessions spread over two months and a half during the monsoon every year. Three of the sessions deal with advertising, the next three with newspapers and four on the cinema. The remaining two sessions are devoted to practical projects like putting together an advertisement, a chart, a wall newspaper or a scrapbook, and to guided visits to film or communication institutes. Over the last five years more than a dozen schools have participated in this experiment in media education. Some of the questions raised during the sessions which combine the lecture and the discussion methods are: How deeply has the media affected you? What kind of films do you see? Are they all fantasies or are they based on

reality? Is the press really a monopoly? In whose hands is the control of the media? Is this control commercial, or political, or ideological? Why are advertisements called 'hidden persuaders?' Are all advertisements varnished lies?[17] The programme has been suspended for the time being in order to give a greater impetus to the training of teams of teachers in other cities. In 1985-86 four workshops for teachers were held in different parts of the country to enthuse them about the new subject and to help them run courses in their own schools. THe Central Board of Education has approved the syllabus and the textbook prepared by the 'Mediaworld' team, and it is very likely that a few schools at least will introduce a formal course in media education in a year or so.

Chitrabani

An equally significant albeit short-lived experiment in media education was carried out in the early eighties by Gaston Roberge at the Chitrabani Communication Centre, Calcutta. It was essentially an attempt to get a group of young people to explore the popular cinema as a form of entertainment rather than as an art form, through informal discussion and reflection. Roberge describes his pedagogic method as 'exploratory' and 'cyclical' and believes that film analysis must involve social analysis.[18]

THE NEED FOR MEDIA EDUCATION

In a patricial and Brahmanical society such as ours the need for a media education will not gain acceptance so easily. It could be that it is seen as a threat to the

status quo, to the entrenched power of elitist communication and education structures. What is more, the need is not felt to be so urgent since exposure and access to the mass media even in urban areas are still very limited. The mass media in India are, after all, still only 'minority' media as far as actual access is concerned. The reach and coverage of radio and television, for instance, is no doubt very extensive (94% and 70% of the population, respectively) but barely a third of that population can afford a receiver. 'Community' listening and watching is fairly popular but both Central and State governments have dragged their feet in the allocation of funds for 'community' sets. Cinema is easily the most popular mass media but here too access is restricted because of the small number of exhibition outlets. With the video revolution now taking place, however, this situation is bound to change soon. Access to the press which is perhaps the freest in the world is also restricted because of low literacy levels (barely 35%), a poor transport system in the rural and mofussil areas, and a woefully inadequate purchasing power (40% of the population lives below the poverty line). Further, the syllabi in schools are so overloaded that it is almost impossible to introduce a new subject as part of the curriculum, or even to add a new unit to existing subjects. Besides, the teaching methods are geared to helping students pass the public examinations and then to gain admission to profession-oriented institutes, and to colleges and universities offering higher degrees in arts, commerce and the sciences. (A good majority

of our high school students go in for higher education). School education may be on the concurrent list of our Constitution but for all practical purposes it is New Delhi that dictates a national core curriculum in order to promote the social goals of democracy, secularism and socialism. The new educational[19] policy fails to chalk out a different path. Thus, media education does not fit into this state-controlled and exam-oriented system. The question sometimes raised is: Does India really need to introduce school courses in media education especially those on the 'Western' models? The joint extended Indian family, it must be noted, though gradually turning nuclear in the big cities is still very close-knit and largely determines media access, exposure and influence.[20] At the grassroot-level India continues to be a complex system of varied classes, clans and aborogines, with caste and creed-based barriers, cultural complexity and illiteracy.[21] Moreover, the traditional or folk media continue to hold sway over the masses though official support for them is minimal. The media and information explosion has, in fact, reached only the middle and upper classes of urban society. India has a long way to go before it reaches the media saturation of the affluent Western countries. And yet, she ranks tenth in industrial development, produces the largest number of science graduates in the world, has its own satellite communications network and is on the way to becoming the foremost exporter of computer software. The 'Green' Revolution has been followed by the electronic revolution. The 'competerisation' of India is on the cards,

what with the import of the latest American super-computer, the proliferation of computer shops and the boom in computer education (501 schools taught it in 1985-86)[22] and the setting up of computer production units in the private and the public sectors.[23] Over the last year the Central Government has distributed around 300 BBC micros and a thousand other micros to schools across the country.

Many more are likely to be distributed during the current five-year plan. On December 31, 1986, a massive national computer network using satellite earth stations will be installed to link up all state capitals and 100 districts.[24] It is evident that the Prime Minister means business when he says that he plans to take India into the 21st century. His new educational policy reinforces this. It says: This is a moment in our nation's history when new directions have to be given to education. The new design of education emphasises that it must be available to all and should promote the common good and national integration, encourage development of a scientific temper and the inculcation of the values of humanism and social jsutice. It must also provide the manpower to support the national goal of self-reliance in a competitive world, in which progressive expansion of knowledge and technology is becoming a prequisite for survival.[25] Not surprisingly, there is no reference at all to media education and computer literacy in the document. But one fails to see how a 'scientific temper' and 'the values of humanism and social justice' can be inculcated when the study of the media and computers

is left out of the picture. Any sound model of media education must have as its basis good research on the sociology of youth.

RESEARCH ON SOCIOLOGY OF INDIAN YOUTH

A review of the research literature on Indian youth and the media reveals an abundance of studies on college-going adolescents[26] but very few studies on the high school or pre-high school student. One of the earliest analysis of the Indian adolescent's relationship with the media was Savitri Aggarwal's Cinema and its effect on the adolescent mine.[27] It is a study of the responses of 300 high school and college girls of Allahabad on their hobbies. Book reading appeared to be the most frequently mentioned hobby, and collection of pictures of actors and actresses the least. Those who frequented cinema houses said they didn't see films even once a month, and the types of films they saw were mainly of the social and the religious types. Aggarwal's conclusion was that the girls were not much affected by films.

The role and impact of films in the lives of adolescents of other cities has been the subject of much research right from the mid-'fifties. M K Naik [28] investigated the place of public cinema in the life of boys attending secondary schools in Bombay, D S Mittal[29] examined the impact of cinema on Chandigarh's school children, J B Hansa[30] carried out a study of film preferences of Baroda's adolescents, and P C Aggarwal[31] went into the impact of cinema on the adolescents of Jaipur. These early 'impact' studies were fairly crude and tentative and were restricted to the cinema. During

the 'seventies the impact of radio broadcasts on children of 20 secondary schools of Greater Bombay[32] and more significantly, television effects came under scrutiny. Two studies of Bombay's student population at the time were G D Panchayil's Impact of television on the student population of Jawahar Nagar, Goregaon,[33] and O L Henderson's Mass Media among school students in Bombay.[34] Henderson is a forceful advocate of media education, especially film appreciation. It should be the objective of teachers, he argues, to build individual and social responsibility for motion pictures and other mass media, that is, we would have to make them take the role of the citizen and see how they could help to improve the quality of life of the city/village where they lived ... The greatest immediate need is to awaken a critical attitude in the film-going public and thereby to evaluate their tastes. This calls for some basic training in film appreciation and in the modern techniques and devices employed by filmakers. Such training should enable film-goers to:

a) discriminate objectively between film and to assess correctly what is valuable or objectionable in them under the two aspects of art and morality,

b) react rationally to what the screen projects so as not to be swayed by incomplete, warped or totally wrong ideas about life and love,

c) become discriminating in the matter of viewing films so that they do not crowd cinema-halls merely to pass the

time or escape from reality.

Henderson called for film appreciation to be made a regular part of the school and college curriculum, or at least occupy a place among the co-curricular activities. He wanted students to discuss films from both the aesthetic and moral points of view in order to sharpen their critical faculties. His moral and aesthetic concerns are not so blatant in an earlier media study of Bombay's school children. In her doctoral thesis on the Influence of the Sociological Factors on the Education of Children in Greater Bombay,[35] Z.K. Setranjiwala recommended film education in order 'to narrow the psychological and social gap separating teachers from pupils'. She concludes her thesis with these ringing words: It is time that authorities in India should seriously ponder over the relationship between the student unrest and the psychological and social gap separating teachers from pupils. One step for narrowing the gap would be to follow Hungary's example and introduce obligatory teaching of film aesthetics in schools.[36] She had surveyed 600 pupils of Standard X (aged 15-16 years) in 16 schools and also 600 parents and 100 teachers.

These early reflections in India on media education appear to correspond with similar moral and aesthetic approaches advocated by the first media education advocates in the United States and Europe. The clear assumption in such reflections is that the media are a significant means of 'socialization' and 'moderniz-

ation'. Mass media play a significant role in the socialization of the young, asserts a study on the exposure of Delhi youth to the mass media.[37] It is further assumed that an extensive exposure necessarily influences the young, always believed to be passive respondents. The study concludes that greater access and exposure to the mass media is noticed among youth of parents whose economic, educational and occupational status is higher. The mass media are, therefore, essentially class media. There is lower consumption of the media mong youth from poorer families, and they do so primarily for entertainment.[38]

Shingi, Singh and Jadhav[39] found evidence to confirm these conclusions in a study they did on the rural youth of Gujarat. Their survey showed that a majority of rural youths visited movie theatres (63%), listened to the radio (78%), and read newspapers (69%). Youths from all categories of land-holdings saw films, though those coming from large-sized family holdings saw a greater number of films - an average of 37 films per year.

Further confirmation of the 'mass media are class media' thesis is offered in an investigation by Haq[40] of the newspaper and magazine reading habits of public school and non-public school students. The two groups, he discovered, differed not only in their selection of newspapers and magazines but also in their very selection of the topics they read. For instance, most public school children were more oriented to

English newspapers and periodicals such as Time, Life, Span, Science Today and the Illustrated Weekly of India which carry news of national and international events and personalities. Children from the non-public schools, on the other hand, read the Navbharat Times, a Hindi daily, and very rarely the Times of India or the Hindustan Times, both English dailies. The two groups of children differed also in their attitudes to nespapers and periodicals, and the degreee of their exposure to the press.

But in her recent survey of students in the twin cities of Hyderababd and Secunderabad, Usha Reddi[41] challenges this thesis. She gathered from her data that availability rather than socio-economic and cultural background determined exposure and choice. The degree of access and exposure and access to the mass media today, she argues, is the direct result of the media boom in the country with the explosion in the number of newspapers and magazines, and the tremendous growth of television that has taken place since they Yadava (1979) study was conducted. Yet, 'income plays a critical role in the quantum of media exposure among adolescents', though family income does not influence exposure to films. This is perhaps because of 'the overwhelming presence of movies, and also because movies provide cheap entertainment. What affects quantum of movie exposure is parental

approval which increases as disciplinary restrictions are removed with age'. This is not so with girls, however, for 'as daughters grow older, they share a greater part of the household chores, reducing the leisure time available for media exposure.' In any case, most exposure is in the company of the family or close relatives; only to a small extent with friends or peer groups. In the twin cities, the families are also predominantly nuclear in structure, and media exposure takes place in the presence of the family.

To come to my own survey of a thousand students of Standard IX (aged 13-15 years), 150 teachers and 60 parents in Greater Bombay, only a few tentative observations can be offered since the full computer analysis is yet to be completed. My purpose was to investigate the extent of media access and exposure, the place of exposure, content preferences, and the views of students, teachers and parents on media and computer education. The students came from three distinct types of schools: (a) municipal schools at which no fees are paid by the economically backward students, and where the medium of instruction is usually Marathi, the local language; (b) Catholic parish schools which teach through English but are aided by the State Government, and (c) the private English-medium schools run by boards of trustees, and generally unaided by the State Government. The teachers surveyed were also from the same three

types of schools, but the parents who sent in completed questionnaires were only from the second and third types.

A preliminary analysis of the responses of municipal school children suggests that hardly any of them watch English programmes on television, go to English films, listen to English-language broadcasts except for sports, or read English nespapers, magazines and comics. Their favourite singers are the popular Hindi and Marathi singers: Lata Mangeshkar, Kishore Kumar and Suresh Wadkar. Hindi film songs are the most popular among them, though Marathi songs were mentioned quite frequently. Significantly, the majority of these students were from the lower castes, economicaaly very backward, and generally living in one-room tenements or chawls or jhopadpattis (slums). The majority also said they were from joint families, with few of their parents having studied beyond high school. The parents were mostly workers in mills and factories, or were invloved in small self-employed jobs such as catching and selling fish, carpentry, the distribution of milk, or doing 'contract' or 'piece' work.

The favourite television programmes appeared to be the popular Hindi serials, 'Nukkad', 'Yeh Jo Hair Zindagi', Karamchand' and 'Khandaan' (an Indian take-off on Dynasty). The favourite films were the Marathi box-office hit, 'Dhum Dadakha' and Amitabh-Bacchan-starrers, particularly the recent'Mard'. Hindi films proved to be extremely

popular also among students of the Catholic schools (the majority in these schools, incidentally, are HIndus and Muslims, not Catholics), and of the private schools, whether English or Marathi-medium. This holds true of Hindi film songs and singers as well. Western'pop' groups such as Wham!, Dire Straits or the Beatles, and singers like Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson seem to be liked only by Catholic students and those Hindu and Muslim students from more affluent families.

If there is a pattern, therefore, in media exposure and media choice among students of the three types of schools it is the immense popularity of the Hindi 'commercial' film, the Hindi film song and the Hindi television serial among all no matter what their caste, or religious or socioeconomic background. The differences among the three types is in the kind of television serial or film liked, or the newspapers, magazines and comics preferred.

AN 'INDIAN' MODEL OF MEDIA EDUCATION

What this implies for any attempt to sketch a model or models of media education for Indian schools is that these striking similarities and differences among students from three distinct types of schools must needs be taken cognizance of. It is also evident that any programme in media education for schools has to be based on popular cinema and popular television series not merely because children spend so much time

with them but chiefly because that is what interests them and means so much to them. Moreover, these are the media that wield the greatest cultural and political influence in Indian society, next of course only to thefamily and the community. Some questions that need to be raised are: How do the media 'construct' their messages and values? What is the politics and economics involved in these 'constructions' particularly in the representation of marginal groups? What are the many ways in which we as audiences actively 'reconstruct' the messages and values thus received, with and through the help of our families, communities and schools? What is the relationship between the mass media and the folk media? How is a 'computerized' society likely to affect our society and the media themselves? How real is the threat from transnationals (e.g. news agencies, computer hardware and software exporters) in our cultural, economic and political situation?

Any model of media education for Indian children must take the mix of the traditional and modern in our society into account. Equally important is the fact of India's cultural diversity of regional, linguistic and religious groups. The new educational policy does not respect this cultural and regional diversity, and in its attempt to impose a national core curriculum makes a mockery of the principle of federalism which is at the heart of the Indian

Constitution. The theory and praxis of amedia education policy for the country as a whole cannot afford to overlook this basic principle of federalism, and the principle that flows from it, that of pluralism in religion, culture, language and race. So, one of the major aims of a media education policy should be the preservation of popular 'local' cultures through a study of the folk media in conjunction with the modern electronic media.

Further, the policy (or model) must have as its foundation theories of communication developed from Indian thought and experience, and not the 'linear', 'hierarchical' Aristotelian models of the West. Krishan Sondhi,[42] J.S. Yadava[43] and Wimal Dissanayake[44] have succeeded in developing Indian theories of communication based on ancient classical texts on dramaturgy, grammar and aesthetics. It is now a question of building on thes 'holitisic' theories to evolve theories and models of media education which are true to the tradition and the genius of our land. Until now, we have borrowed heavily from the British, American and Australian thinking on and experience of media education. (Interestingly, those who pioneered the media education programmes in India had their training in communications at Manila and Fairfield universities.)

It is time we struck out on our own taking into account the media situation in India and the research done on our youth's use and experience

of different kinds of media in urban and rural areas. The curricula for the programmes in media education need to be founded on solid research and theory.

The theoretical foundations from which the curriculum specialists of the West appear to have derived their courses and pedagogic methods are thought to be: impact mediation, goal attainment, cultural understanding, and visual skills.[45] These four 'models' are loosely based on the four approaches or theories of mass communication research developed mainly in the United States and Britain, namely, 'effects','uses and gratifications', 'culturist' and 'aesthetic'. British media educators have generally developed and supported the 'political economy' approach which seems most meaningful in a class-based society.

Developing countries need to look closer at the Latin American 'liberation' approach to media education. Deriving from a radical theology and politics, the mian objective of the approach is to 'conscientize' and urge participation in mass media activities at the local and regional levels. It is, in sum, based on the 'democratization' model of communication argued for by Fernando Reyes Matta [46] and others, a model that seeks to promote a dialogic and participative communication system as opposed to a top-down hierarchical communication structure. It has a strong commitment to social justice, equal access, local

cultures and democracy. It seeks also to involve not just the children in media education programmes but teachers, animators, families, and in fact the whole community.

But it would be idle to expect media education by itself to bring about a revolution in taste or even a social revolution. All that can perhaps be hoped to be achieved is to start the process of discussion, criticism and reflection so as to help all citizens to participate in the life of a democracy, and in India's case, a democracy that is federal, secular (in the best sense of the word, viz., equally respectful of all religions) and pluralistic, and a society that is still larlgely traditional, centred round the joint family and relgion, but ever so gently being pushed into the video and the computer age.

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